MPA Tip: On Resolving Management Conflicts with Stakeholders

"MPA Tip" is a recurring feature that provides advice on MPA planning and management gathered from practitioners and publications. The following tip was adapted by *MPA News* from *Managing Marine Protected Areas: A Toolkit for the Western Indian Ocean*, published by the Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association (WIOMSA). Consisting of a series of themed briefs, the toolkit offers guidance on a diverse array of MPA management topics and is available online at www.wiomsa.org/mpatoolkit/Home.htm.

Tip: A variety of conflicts may arise in relation to an MPA, most often connected to resource allocation. These conflicts may be between management and stakeholders, or among stakeholder groups. The following actions can help managers to resolve conflicts:

- **Attempt to find something that can be agreed upon** However small, this area of agreement can establish a tone of cooperation and problem-solving to tackle other issues.
- **Admit mistakes, when appropriate, and be prepared to accept different opinions** A manager who admits that a particular policy has not worked as intended can gain the support of the affected stakeholder groups and can help to gain trust and encourage positive future interaction.
- **Avoid personal attacks and assigning blame** For example, a manager should not criticize the views of a fisher who is opposed to a new area closure. Instead the manager should explain why the closure is needed, and ask the fisher to provide ideas on how to minimize negative impacts.
- **Generate several potential answers to a problem** This helps to avoid or break deadlocks. If SCUBA-diver impact in a sensitive coral area is causing conflict, for example, rather than banning divers altogether it may be possible to introduce several options such as having temporary closures, alternating days for different dive boats, and increasing diver education and monitoring of divers.